

The President's Daily Brief

5 February 1969

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LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF

5 FEBRUARY 1969

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

6 February 1969

LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF
5 FEBRUARY 1969

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

There is nothing significant to report.

EUROPE

The Soviets have taken a hard stand against any West German proposals for a deal under which Moscow would renounce "rights" it has already asserted to intervene in West German affairs under the Potsdam accords and the United Nations charter, in return for Bonn's signature of the nonproliferation treaty. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] until a German peace treaty is concluded, the Soviets will continue to regard both documents as the basis for their relations with Bonn. [REDACTED]

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In West Germany, a parliamentary controversy has arisen over recent criticism of certain aspects of the nonproliferation treaty by two ranking diplomats, one the Foreign Office's commissioner for disarmament. The matter has taken a strong political coloration; the Socialists are critical and the Christian Democrats are defending the diplomats. The leader of the small Free Democratic Party also is critical. He told US Embassy officers on 5 February that his party is solidly in

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favor of West German signature of the treaty.

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The Socialists yesterday apparently reneged on an earlier promise to support Kai-Uwe von Hassel, a Christian Democrat, as the new president of the West German parliament. Von Hassel won anyway, by two votes, but he had to rely on votes from the Free Democrats, who are not in the grand coalition. This looks like yet another reason for a loosening--if not dismemberment--of the coalition prior to elections later this year.

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SOVIET AFFAIRS

There is nothing significant to report.

VIETNAM

The Viet Cong Radio announced today that another US prisoner would be released during the Tet holiday, which occurs from 17 to 19 February. The captive is said to be John A. Kuhman, a US soldier who was born in West Germany. The Viet Cong may be planning to make a propaganda issue out of his birthplace. (Reuters, Saigon, 6 Feb 69)

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The press also reports that two terrorists bombed a local civil guard headquarters in Saigon today. We expect more of this type of attack as Tet approaches. (Reuters, Saigon, 6 Feb 69)

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

There is nothing of significance to report.

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

There is nothing of significance to report.

EUROPE

As we had expected, the debate in West Germany over the nonproliferation treaty is heating up and is threatening to spill over into this year's election campaign. Brandt downgraded the arguments against the treaty last week in an article put out by his party's press service, and CDU and CSU leaders have been rebutting him ever since. The CSU, with Franz-Josef Strauss himself in the van, is particularly vehement and comprehensive in its objections. We assume that one motive behind Bonn's urgent requests for a US demarche to the Soviets is a desire to have the issue resolved as far as possible in advance of the elections next fall.

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Moscow has made a bit more headway in its efforts to head off the meeting of the West German Federal Assembly in West Berlin. Soviet Ambassador Abrasimov has managed to dent Mayor Schuetz's belief that the meeting would not stimulate any major Communist countermeasures.

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Ambassador Tsarapkin

will doubtless be trying to drive the wedge in farther in his upcoming talk with Brandt at the latter's Black Forest retreat.

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The Soviets may be having troubles of their own, however. Deputy Foreign Minister Semenov met yesterday in Berlin with high East German leaders, probably to go over several issues--including the Assembly meeting--on which Soviet and East German policies differ. We will probably hear more noise from the Soviets about the Assembly in the future, although not as much as Pankow would like.

At the moment we still expect the meeting to be held in Berlin as planned.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

For the past three weeks there has been a sense of unease in Moscow concerning the situation in the Kremlin. The factor contributing most conspicuously to this unease has been Kosygin's long absence from his desk (he was last seen publicly on 20 December).

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Brezhnev has not been seen in public since 22 January,

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Another member of the Politburo, Kirilenko, has 50X1
been out of sight since 13 December. Other members of the
Politburo have filled in for them, resulting in unusual pub-
lic exposure for Shelepin, among others. As an ambitious
"junior" who is believed to have made an unsuccessful attempt
in 1965 to topple some of his elders, Shelepin's activities
are always the subject of special interest.

The uncertainty has also been heightened by the regime's
silence, since its initial terse announcement, concerning the
attack on the cosmonaut motorcade on 22 January. Soviet citi-
zens have been speculating wildly. Some fear the incident
was a secret police provocation by which to justify a crack-
down on political nonconformists, while others believe the at-
tack was against the Soviet leadership rather than the cosmo-
nauts.

The Soviet press has recently carried several articles
expressing dissatisfaction, in veiled terms, with the way
in which the leadership has been exercised. These articles
are not unprecedented, but their appearance during this period
of uncertainty has contributed to the over-all sense of unease.

We have no good information on the forces behind these
articles or on their intended targets. We suspect, however,
that individual members of the leadership may be jockeying for
position, perhaps with an eye to the possibility that Kosygin
may not return to duty.

The Annex today provides some background on the current
relationships among the Soviet leaders.

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The Soviets are concerned, as we are, that Ayub's position is shaky and that his fall could only mean confusion, instability, and an opening for the Chinese. They clearly want to preserve the status quo on the subcontinent and probably hope to maintain the advantage over the US and Communist China they feel they attained after the settlement of Tashkent in 1965.

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VIETNAM

Thieu is increasingly beset with demands that he reshuffle his cabinet. The list of those who have recently made clear their wish

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for major changes in Saigon includes Vice President Ky, III Corps commander Do Cao Tri, General "Big" Minh and, of course, the militant Buddhists.

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Thieu apparently is also receiving reports from various South Vietnamese quarters that the US might be sympathetic to the idea of major changes in the government, including perhaps even the replacement of Thieu with a "peace regime." Thieu seems to be taking such rumors in stride thus far, but he remains innately suspicious of the US. Moreover, he knows that any rumor that the US might support a move to oust him is certain to encourage his enemies.

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The Communists staged several rocket and mortar attacks on allied positions in the delta yesterday. The Communists also fired three mortar rounds out of the southern portion of the Demilitarized Zone yesterday. This is the third such incident in the last few days.

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A recent spate of items in the North Vietnamese press reflects great dissatisfaction with the country's internal affairs and the performance of leadership cadre all down the line. For several weeks there have been signs of displeasure and strong suggestions that certain segments of the populace are flagging in their support of the war or at least not putting forth the kind of effort the regime demands. Groups, individuals, and even party leaders have been charged with a variety of sins, ranging from corruption to "individualism," but the main thrust is against anyone who is not fully concentrating on carrying out regime policy.

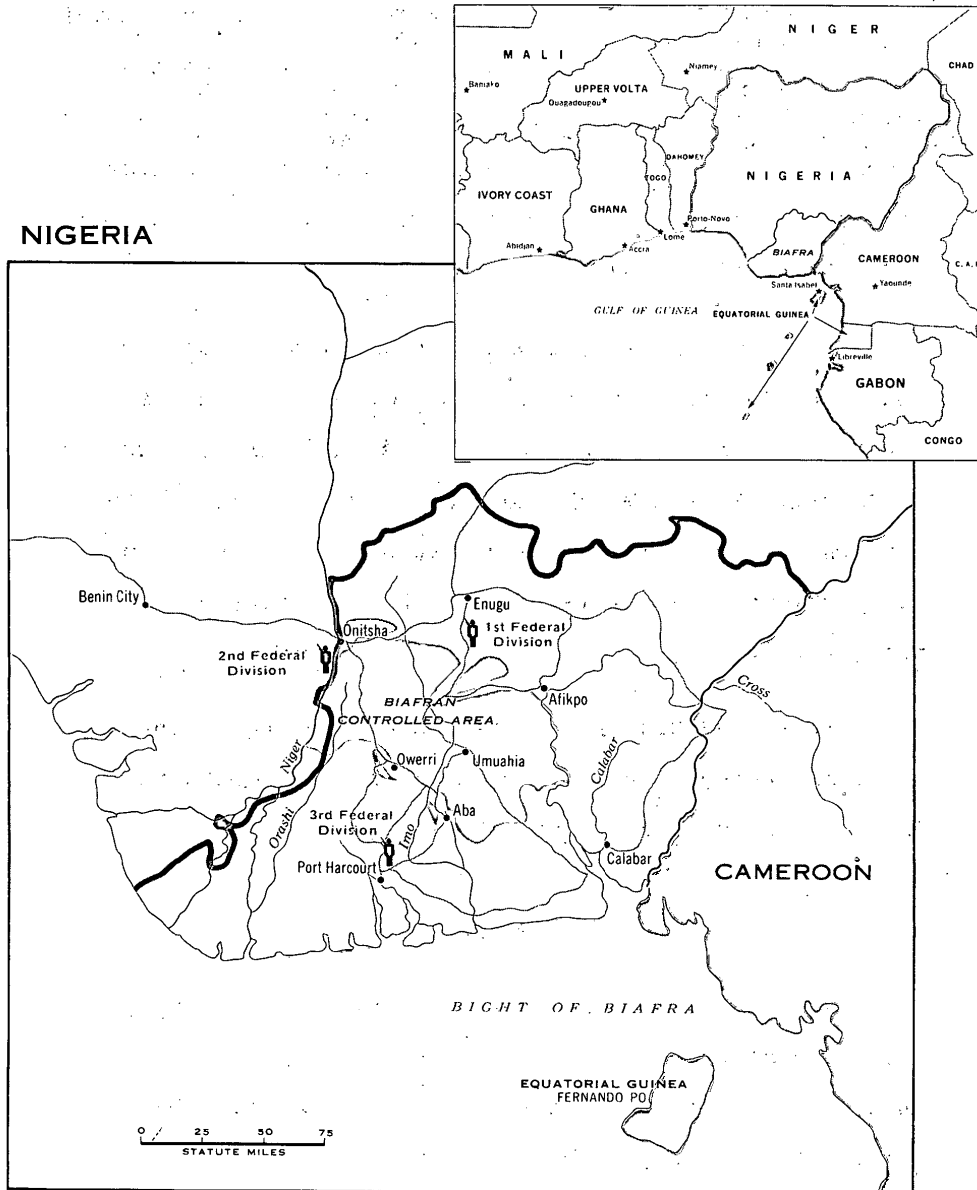
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This campaign seems designed to counter the wide-spread relaxation in North Vietnam which followed the US bombing halt on 1 November. Hanoi tolerated this for a short time, but in the last two months there has been growing emphasis on needs of the war in the South, improvement of conditions in the North, and preparation for future reconstruction. With the impetus of common danger removed, the regime seems to have more trouble obtaining maximum effort than before the bombing stopped. There is no persuasive evidence at this time, however, that these problems seriously weaken the Communist war effort. We regard the harsh language used recently as an attempt to head off trouble before it gets out of hand.

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NIGERIA



II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

NIGERIA

The Biafrans, who recently were very short of ammunition, are again receiving nearly 100 tons of arms a week through the nightly airlift from Gabon and the Ivory Coast. A shipment of ammunition (about 1.2 million small arms rounds) is also en route by sea from France to Gabon for airlifting into Biafra.

In the war itself, there is some fighting on the south central edge of the Biafran perimeter. Biafran forces there are trying to retake an important crossroads at Owerri. To the North, federal forces are trying to link up east of Onitsha, mainly to simplify their supply problems. Casualties in all this skirmishing are thought to be light.

Frustrated Nigerian leaders are planning another major offensive, but we doubt that their troops can force an early break in the stalemate.

COMMUNIST CHINA

The Chinese Communists today poured some more cold water on the upcoming Warsaw talks. They informed the embassy in Warsaw that their chargé--not their ambassador still in Peking--will participate at the session on 20 February. The Chinese also said that the meeting would take place at the usual location, and not in the Chinese or US embassy, as proposed by the US.

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THE SOVIET COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The group that ousted Khrushchev in October 1964 reinstated the system of collective leadership in which members of the Politburo share--although not equally--in formulating policy. Within the Politburo there have been adjustments in assignments and shifts in power relations, but the membership of this top policy-making body--especially its full or "voting" members--has changed very little in the past four years.

The 11-man Politburo is composed of overlapping and sometimes shifting cliques based on regional associations, age, and shared outlooks in the approach to key policy problems. One fairly central element has been the "Ukrainian group," headed by Brezhnev and including Podgorny, Kirilenko, Polyansky and Shelest. There are no such obvious alignments, based on geographic ties, in the careers of the other six.

Cutting across this grouping is an age gap between the "seniors"--all over 60--and the "juniors" in their early 50's, who on occasion have not been consulted and have voiced their resentment. Kosygin apart, most of the "seniors"--Brezhnev, Podgorny, Kirilenko, Suslov, Pelshe and Shelest--now present an image of thoroughly conventional Soviet Communist bureaucrats. Their view of the world and their political vocabulary--formed during the Stalin years--have preserved heavy traces of the "siege" mentality of those years. "Imperialist encirclement" and the contagion of foreign ideas are for them real dangers, only slightly mitigated by the fact that the Soviet Union has greatly reduced its international isolation.

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Kosygin and the "juniors"--Mazurov, Polyansky, Shelepin and Voronov--appear to lean to a generally more pragmatic approach, perhaps because they hold or have held positions in the state apparatus responsible for the execution of policy. For them, probably, the danger of contamination by the West is weighed against what can be achieved by a degree of cooperation--both in terms of relaxed budgetary pressures and in access to technological know-how from abroad. They seem to believe that some modifications of the Soviet system, particularly in the economic sphere, are needed and that somewhat more scope must be given to the "experts" whose contribution lies in technical knowledge, not Marxist-Leninist fervor.

Contributing to these cross currents is the fact that the composition of the Politburo now reflects the power relationships among the major interest groups in the country. The party apparatus, government bureaucracy, agricultural interests, and the military-defense industrial complex all seem to have men on the Politburo to whom they can look to represent their views. This balance has favored both stability and orthodoxy.

[redacted]
[redacted] the Politburo [redacted] meets regularly once a week, more often when the pressure of work demands. Its approval is required on all important matters, as well as on a large number of seemingly trivial questions. An effort is apparently made to reach unanimous agreement among all 11 members. If this is not possible, decision may be deferred or the minority view may be overridden. [redacted]

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Brezhnev chairs Politburo meetings and presumably his opinion carries greater weight than any other. Despite the efforts to coordinate even small details of official policy positions--sometimes down to the texts of Pravda articles--and the careful observance of accepted codes of procedure, it is clear that differences of views, political rivalries and the considerable overlapping of responsibilities among members of the Politburo all create strain within the leadership.

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Collective leadership by its very nature has meant hesitation, procrastination, and on occasion an attempt to follow mutually contradictory policy lines simultaneously. It has also led to long periods when the entire energies of the Politburo were focused on one pressing problem to the exclusion of all others.

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The international situation has contributed to the growing orthodoxy in the Politburo. Increased international tensions--stemming from the war in Vietnam, the Middle East crisis and concern about developments in China--gave the spokesmen for the military and the defense industry more powerful voices, at least in budgetary matters, and proved a boon to conservatives who oppose accommodation with the West and favor greater discipline at home.

In an atmosphere inconducive to the cause of reform-minded moderates, their position in the leadership was weakened. Kosygin came to have less influence than Brezhnev, who showed himself ready to listen to the military. Brezhnev has been careful to stay close to the center of opinion in the Politburo, but that center is considerably more to the conservative side than it was at the time of Khrushchev's ouster.

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The Czechoslovak problem probably presented the collective leadership with its most difficult hours, and may have placed some of the top leaders in a weaker position. Brezhnev may, for a variety of reasons, become the most obvious and convincing scapegoat for an unsatisfactory episode in the conduct of affairs abroad. Soviet politics has a way of searching out scapegoats, and the Czechoslovak affair may yet be used against him in the future.

In maintaining the delicate power balance at the top, Kosygin has a pivotal role, despite the fact that Brezhnev is clearly "chairman of the board." Kosygin's stature as an economic administrator is unchallenged; he is not associated with either regional rivalries or partisan pleading for special interest groups. There have been periodic flurries of rumors that he intends to step down, either because of dissatisfaction with the trend of conservatism in the Politburo or because of ill health. Should he do so, the strongest moderating influence in the group would be lost. Moreover, the difficult problem of choosing his replacement would bring to the fore all the accumulated frictions, rivalries and unsolved problems that have accumulated. It would certainly put a severe strain on the system of collectivity, and the outcome might change radically the face of the Soviet leadership.

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